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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 6149
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 2336
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 2615
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 3302
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002587

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TAGS: [ASEAN](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [EXBS](#) [BG](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH BANGLADESH
FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISER CHOWDHURY

Classified By: Deputy Secretary Negroponte, reasons 1.4 c, d

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Secretary Negroponte conveyed U.S. interest in a transition to democratic elections in Bangladesh, in a July 31 meeting with Bangladesh's Adviser for Foreign Affairs Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury on the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Chowdhury assured the Deputy Secretary that Bangladesh's interim government intended to hold national elections in December 2008. Chowdhury also described four basic reform objectives of the interim government: electoral reform, civil service reform, anticorruption, and good governance. Chowdhury stated that Bangladesh would accede to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and would express support for the Philippines' bid for observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conference. End Summary.

National Elections in 2008

¶2. (C) The Deputy Secretary emphasized to Chowdhury U.S. interest in a transition back to democratic elections in Bangladesh. Chowdhury noted that these are "interesting times" in Bangladesh and assured the Deputy Secretary that the interim government intended to hold national elections in December 2008.

¶3. (C) Chowdhury described the interim government as composed of apolitical constitutional technocrats, each with a set of discrete duties to discharge. According to Chowdhury, the interim government is not ideological and has no political "afterlife" as a group, though individual members of the government may continue on in politics after the December 2008 elections.

¶4. (C) The interim government has strong popular support, said Chowdhury, though it does not seek to "advertise itself." He maintained that the interim government is answerable to the media and to the "court of public opinion," and said that the goal of the government is to "come in, do what it was supposed to do, and leave."

¶5. (C) Chowdhury stated that the interim government seeks to redress a Bangladeshi political institution that had "gone wrong." In his opinion, Bangladeshi politics suffered from a "winner takes all" mentality in which the political losers would "lose completely" and the opposition had a propensity to "go to the streets." This system also forced political winners to perpetuate themselves in office and fostered, in

the executive, a sense of impunity. Chowdhury described his hope that "secular liberal parties" would emerge in Bangladesh and that a system of "power sharing with the opposition" would arise. He said that the "cost of political defeat" must be reduced and that the "winner take all" system must be undone.

The Four Baskets of Reform

¶6. (C) Chowdhury described the interim government's four baskets of reform: electoral reform, civil service reform, anticorruption, and good governance. Chowdhury stated that the interim government has until the December 2008 elections to institute these reforms.

¶7. (C) Chowdhury said the Election Commission has developed a roadmap for national elections with a target date of December 2008, adding that local elections may occur before then. Referring to civil service reform, Chowdhury regretted the growing politicization of the civil service over the last 20 years and said the interim government seeks to return to an apolitical civil service. Chowdhury also discussed his government's fight against corruption, an effort that he said is spearheaded by the Anticorruption Commission. Turning to good governance, Chowdhury emphasized that "no agent of the government can be above the law." The interim government is focused on the procedures by which the government disburses funds, and expects that reforms will delink members of parliament from this process. He also said that the government had made strides in the sphere of human rights.

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¶8. (C) Chowdhury stated that he recently sent the Deputy Secretary a letter addressing U.S. interest in the cases of

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Bangladeshi political detainees charged with corruption. He said that the interim government's action in these cases is "rooted in the idea that nobody is above the law."

¶9. (C) Chowdhury emphasized positive developments in Bangladesh, noting its "tranquility" and the prevailing "peaceful and stable" atmosphere. He pointed to various Bangladeshi strengths, including its "fiercely" independent media, progressive educational institutions, women's empowerment, and the marginalizing of extremists. Chowdhury also noted that Bangladesh is a responsible international actor, adding in particular that Bangladesh is the "number one peacekeeper in the world."

ARF Agenda

¶10. (C) Turning to this year's ASEAN Regional Forum, Chowdhury said Bangladesh would accede to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. He also stated that he would announce Bangladesh support for the Philippine's candidacy for observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conference, noting the "good job" the Philippines has done in implementing the 1996 Peace Agreement between the Philippine government the Moro National Liberation Front.

¶11. (U) July 31, 2007; 1645-1715; Manila, Philippines.

¶12. (U) Meeting participants:

U.S.
Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte
Kaye Lee, Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of State
Adam Scarlatelli, Notetaker

Bangladesh

Foreign Minister Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury
Muhammad Abul Quaashem, Ambassador to the Philippines
Mosud Mannan, Director General (International Organizations)
Mahfuzur Rahman, Director (International Organizations)
Asad Alam Siam, Director (Foreign Advisor's Office)
Md. Jafar Uddin, Counsellor
KENNEY